

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

RECOLLECTING OURSELVES FOR WORSHIP

Music (please use this time for quiet and reflection)

Gong [followed by silence]

Call to Worship

Hymn – 488

Opening Prayer

OUR HUMANNESS AND GOD'S GRACE

Call to Confession

Unison Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, I notice things about myself, and what follows immediately is commentary about what has been noticed. The commentary is an opinion about or assessment of the propriety of what was perceived. I believe the commentary is designed to discourage me from further considering what I noticed. Awareness of this brings an opportunity to wonder what would happen if the assessment and evaluation were then supplemented by interest and curiosity. I do not know where these would take me because I never go there. Yet, I could go there if I remembered that everything disclosed to me is first evaluated, and that the value of anything is revealed after it is judged, and if then I waited receptively and expectantly for what would be revealed. Make me aware of the difference between what I notice and the commentary about it, and remind me to wait patiently and expectantly in the space that is created by that awareness.

Personal Prayer of Confession in Silence

Assurance of Pardon

LISTENING FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Story for the Children

Scripture – John 3:1-17

Prompting

Silence and Reflection

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Hymn – 392

Announcements

Minute for Mission

Our Gifts and Offerings

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Christ all creatures here below;
Praise Holy Spirit, Comforter;
One God, Triune, whom we adore. Amen.

The Prayers of the People and Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

GOING OUT – to serve, to journey, to live the word

Hymn – 83 [verses 1, 5]

Charge and Benediction

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

TODAY	10:00	Worship
	11:00	Coffee and Fellowship
	11:20	Conversation
	12:00	Lunch Bunch
MONDAY	1:00	Centering Prayer, at church.

Lectionary Readings from Cycle A for March 19, 2017
Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42.

F.Y.I.

Next Sunday we will share lunch. Bring some food to share and plan to stay.

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Our web site is <www.faithpresbyterianrp.org>

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LENT

Think of God as being in the disclosure business: God is constantly disclosing, revealing, introducing, unveiling, divulging us to ourselves so that our sense of who we are expands, we become more transparent to ourselves, and who we are inwardly and outwardly becomes more congruent. This begins by thoughts and feelings, ones we consider inappropriate to who we are, intruding into our awareness and remaining there, in spite of our best efforts to rid ourselves of them, until we accept that they are part of us and realize that we are acceptable to God with them. We live with these intruders for a while, until we realize that they are just the tip of an iceberg, the top of a part of us we do not know very well or at all, and grasp that God intends to introduce us to what more there is. There now begins a time when we take on the activity of being receptive to the unveiling and divulging God will orchestrate for us. This time of our being receptive is known as LENT. The word itself means "spring," from a root meaning "long-days, or lengthening of the day." We have been shown that we have long lived in the darkness about some part of our personality, and now that part of us will be further revealed by the light that slowly encroaches on our awareness.

Second Sunday in Lent [John 3:1-17]

There is a tension in the Christian life between our human need to achieve perfection in the way we understand perfection, and God's desire for our redemption and salvation. To elaborate: "Perfection," in the way we are using it, refers to what we actually, essentially and concretely value, and may, but not necessarily, reference a set of abstract ideals; "Redemption" and "Salvation" are old, traditional words, and the way we might grasp their modern meaning is to understand them as referring to God's desire that we become transparent to ourselves as the way of having our internal and external life become more congruent. Transparency refers to being aware of what is actually true of us, the values that motivate us, the motives at work in us when we say or do something. The more transparent we are to ourselves, the greater the likelihood that our inner and outer life will be consistent and compatible, and the lesser the chance of our behaving in a toxic manner in the way we live and relate. In pursuit of our transparency, God is constantly disclosing us to ourselves, making us aware of feelings and thoughts, especially ones which do not fit easily or at all into our understanding of who we are, should be, or want to be. Being receptive to these thoughts and feelings, and interacting with them, is what it means to live in the kingdom of God, in the sense of living under the influence of God, or living and being influenced by God, who is the creator of insights.

In John 3:3 Jesus says: "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above ["above" can also be translated: anew/again/over again]." The word translated as "see" is a Greek word meaning "to see" in the sense of "mechanical, passive or casual vision." I believe what is being said here is that if we want to readily perceive the influence of God in the common, ordinary world we habitually inhabit we need to be "born again" in the sense of we need to supplement the way of seeing into which we were born and in which we grew up. To be more specific, the human mind is inherently moralistic. That is, our mind's eye looks at what we do, say, think and feel with the intent of determining whether it is right or wrong, correct or incorrect, compared to the standards we have internalized. Our minds are constantly involved in this kind of evaluating and scrutinizing, constantly assessing if we are measuring up, and if not, there is some form of criticism or judgment that is offered in order to affect a correction. This is so normal and natural and constant that it is rarely noticed, and should the idea surface that our minds are like this, the idea is almost always refuted. If we want to perceive the influence of God in disclosing us to ourselves, this moralistic "way of seeing into which we were born" needs

to be supplemented so that we can also see differently, see in a way that does not only evaluate, scrutinize and assess what we are shown about ourselves.

In John 3:5 Jesus says: "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. The word translated as "enter" means just that, and is from a preposition meaning "to or into" + a verb meaning "to come or go." It is not possible to "come to" or "go to" a life that is influenced by God unless one is born of water and Spirit. "Water" here means water, and we might treat it, as is commonly done, as a symbol for the boundary between what lies above and below the surface of life, including what we would call the unconscious. "Spirit" is a Greek word meaning "a current of air," and refers to what we would call a "mental disposition, or vital/essential principle," an internal reality that animates us and can be experienced, yet cannot be seen as something external. I believe the reference in the phrase "water and Spirit" is to "baptism," an outward symbol for our agreeing to be inwardly immersed in something we desire and value. I think what is being said here is that we realize we cannot come to the place of having a life where we are influenced by God unless we value being immersed in a mental disposition other than that into which we were born, a mental disposition that values and includes the exploration of what lies below the surface of life, including what we call the unconscious.

The Christian religion offers us "a mental disposition other than that into which we were born." It describes for us a supplement to the moralistic human mind into which we were socialized. Christianity believes that God has chosen to inhabit our lives with us, and the way we experience this is as the Mind of God beginning to operate within us. This is not the entire Mind of God, but the Mind of God as that Mind incarnates in human flesh. What the underlined words mean is: there appears in our awareness a form of cognition that cannot be accounted for given the way we were raised and the environment in which we were socialized. This Mind thinks in ways we were not taught, processes feelings in ways that were prohibited, relates in ways we were not shown, and approaches life and living in a way that generally does not make sense given the way we were enculturated. The easiest way to describe this different Mind is to say: "it does not moralize." This Mind thinks, appreciates, understands, sympathizes, empathizes, comprehends, invites, welcomes, teaches...but it does not moralize. It enters us, and animates us, and operates in us as a mental disposition or inclination, one that supplements our inherited

mental disposition, and it impacts and influences all of our cognitive faculties: thinking, feeling and perception.

This Mind of God is given as a gift which comes as “awareness” in general, and particularly as the awareness when and that our mind is working in a moralistic, judgmental way. It is important to remember that this Mind informs us when we are being moralistic. It makes us aware we are being moralistic, but it does not ask us to not be moralistic. Asking us to not be moralistic would be to moralize on moralizing, and nothing would change. In the middle of our being moralistic about ourselves or something else, we are “awakened” to the reality that our mind is working this way. This awareness allows us to realize that whatever is being judged is not the same thing as the judgment it is receiving. Seeing this distinction diminishes the judgment in that we get some distance from it, but more importantly it allows us to see whatever is being judged as separate from the judgment. This separation allows for the possibility of our “thinking” and “feeling” about what is being judged rather than our being caught in and reacting to the judgment. This makes it possible to approach and consider what we normally just judge.

We were born into the mind that is our normal human mind; we did not make ourselves this way. That is, by being born into the human community we are socialized in and grow-up into the human mind. We are also born into the Mind of God in that it is not something we create but is something we receive and internalize. This Mind of God is born into us and lives inside us as a Mind that exists alongside our human mind. This Mind makes us aware when moralizing is occurring and then encourages us to look for alternative ways of looking at and approaching whatever we are encountering, something which this Mind also offers us. Our human mind evaluates, criticizes and judges. The Mind of God welcomes, accepts, sympathizes, appreciates, and understands. Our human mind attacks what it considers wrong and defends what it considers right, with the intent of keeping what is right and getting rid of what is wrong. The Mind of God intends to understand both what we consider right and wrong, and include both in an expanded understanding of who we are. The influence of God is toward the development of this Mind in each of us. To live in the kingdom of God is to be open to the influence of this Mind operating in us, and to be responsive to the ways it stimulates us toward this different way of living. We are awakened to our mind being critical and evaluative, and then become curious as to how we would otherwise approach what we are facing. Being “born again” or “born from above” involves slowly maturing into this different way of approaching any and every internal and external

situation which comes to us in the course of our lifetime. Being born again is not about inhabiting any particular feeling state, as it is often presented in our culture. It is about participating in everything with this Mind, paying attention to the way it makes us aware of the way we tend to judge and evaluate, and then encourages us to be curious about how else we might be present.

We are asked to hold up this work God does so people can see it and benefit from it. The reference is to Moses holding up a representation of a serpent when serpents were biting and killing the people. As the people looked upon what was killing them, they recovered and did not die. The word translated as “serpent” means a “snake,” and is also a figure of speech for a “sly, cunning, artful and malicious person.” Imagine there is such a component in each of our personalities, and it is this component that moralizes on us. What kills all of us is the incessant internal moralizing, the judging and criticizing we receive, especially without knowing it is occurring. The work God does in us makes visible what is killing us so it can be seen; once we see it for what it is [something about us that is “sly, cunning, artful and malicious”] it no longer kills us, and can then be approached and understood. In the middle of being criticized we begin to see it happening, which diminishes its impact on us by allowing us to think about the criticism as a criticism and not as a fact. It seems counter-intuitive—the awareness of criticism as criticism and not fact keeps us safe in the middle of being criticized, and ultimately delivers us from being criticized. Our being convinced about the value of receiving this work keeps us safe in the middle of the criticism that thwarts us. “For God so loved the world [the orderly arrangement of life] that he gave his only Son [sent to us his own Mind operating in the way it does], so that everyone who believes in him [gives credence to and relies on the way this Mind works] may not perish [be destroyed] but have eternal life [perpetual vitality]. Indeed, God did not send the Son [Mind] into the world to condemn [to distinguish, i.e. introduce evaluating or assessing] the world, but in order that the world might be saved [protected] through him.” [John 3:16-17] The work done by the Mind of God protects us and our world from the consequences of our internal criticism. It does this by helping us see the criticism as criticism and not as fact, which begins the process of thinking it through and examining it, which diminishes its effect.

We are enabled to participate in this way of life by being “born again” through the advent of the Mind of God, a Mind which takes up residence in our life and supplements the mind into which we were socialized.

[Jim Robie, 3-9-17, Cycle A., John 3:1-17]